20 YEARS!
1987-2007
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Spider-Man
With Great Power

Lapham & Harris Take on Great Responsibility

His story is one of the most iconic in comics—and *David Lapham & Tony Harris* are going to expand on his earliest superpowered experiences in a new series that fills in hitherto-unexplored gaps in his formative days.

Spider-Man: With Great Power, a five-issue limited series, isn't just another "Year One" sort of project. Instead, it offers a look at a brief, undeveloped period in Spider-Man history: the time between that fateful spider bite and the death of Uncle Ben. While this entire time period was glossed over in just a few pages in ***Amazing Fantasy #15,*** Lapham and Harris are convinced that there's more to the story than that—and they're looking forward to bringing those events into the spotlight in this limited series.

"David came up with this idea and pitched it to me a few years back, and I thought it was absolutely tremendous," editor *Warren Simons* told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Matt Brady*. "If you flip through ***Amazing Fantasy #15,*** you see all these great newspaper headlines: '*Spider-Man Wins Showbiz Award,*' '*Spider-Man Plays to Packed House,*' and '*Who Is Spider-Man?*'

"As Stan wrote in the same issue, 'Now anybody with the intelligence of a seven year old knows that if a man appeared on TV who seemed to be more spider than human, he'd be an overnight sensation!' I mean, this is great stuff, and there's a lot of fertile ground to explore there. How crazy was Peter's life at this point in time? Living with Ben and May, going to high school, adjusting to these remarkable powers and becoming a national celebrity at the same time? The kid's got a full plate. So it's a great idea on that front.

The miniseries "takes place in and around the same time as the original ***Amazing Fantasy #15*** story, but our entire series is in between the gutters of two panels when *Stan Lee's* narrative talks about the coming weeks and months that passed," artist *Tony Harris* added. "But we have never seen that time, until now. So I drew Peter very much in the same way he was then, except without the square haircut."

The haircut is one of the few visual changes that Harris brings to this story of high school student Peter Parker and his life-changing experience. He even gives Peter the same nerdy wardrobe he wore over forty-five years ago when he first appeared in ***Amazing Fantasy #15.*** "I use the same sweater vest, and glasses," Harris said. "I tried to incorporate as much of that source material as possible. I expanded a bit on the machine that gave the mysterious spider its massive dose of radiation. But, if you look at the original drawing of it, you'll see it in mine. We also wanted this to look sort of timeless too, so I used a mix of cars from the sixties, and up through modern day. That way it makes it hard to nail down to a specific time."

Lapham was intrigued by the idea of using one or two panels of a comic book as a stepping stone to an entire series. "As Warren said, there's this panel in ***Amazing Fantasy #15,*** on page nine, right between Spidey letting the thief run by him and right before Uncle Ben gets killed," Lapham explained. "One panel where there's a bunch of headlines telling us about how famous Spider Man's become doing the wrestling and Tonight Show circuit. The caption reads, 'In the days that follow, Spider Man becomes the sensation of the nation.' It's a very unspecified period of time. Weeks? Months? We don't know. There's a lot of room for play in that panel. I read it as: this is where Peter Parker lives life in the fast lane. This is where he gets a big head. Gets a taste of money and girls for the first time. This is the salad days...

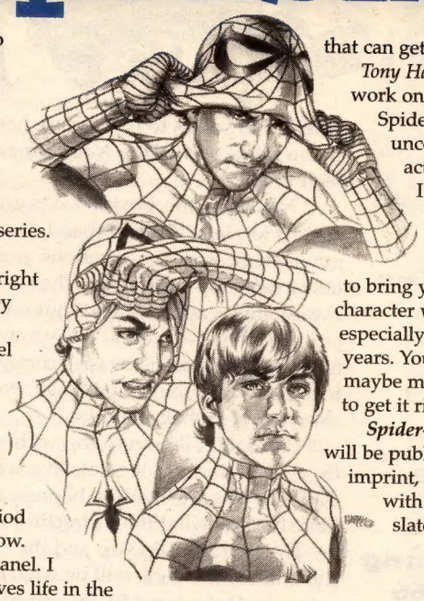
"This is Peter before 'With great power comes great responsibility' ruled his life. It wasn't just Uncle Ben getting capped. That was the event that brought it all together, that stopped his destructive path, but Spidey was a rock star. He had that taste of the sweet life, baby. And you know what? If Pete hadn't let that damn bugler run by him, maybe Uncle Ben would still be alive and maybe, just maybe, Pete would still be out there livin' it up with Mick and Keith and Snoop Dog or whomever..."

"What gets the ball rolling in the miniseries is getting bit by the spider and fighting Crusher Hogan," Lapham said. "He gets approached by promoter Monty Caabash, and ends up becoming quite a famous star in the sordid world of professional wrestling! We've got the mob, we've got a 'Mrs. Robinson' for Pete, we've got giant monsters, and we've got plenty of teen angst, bad decisions, and young love. Yeah...Pete gets a really big head and, like the song says, 'You can't tell (him) nothin'.'

"Flash is there. Liz Allen is there as young Peter's love interest. Monty Caabash is just an expansion on the promoter character briefly seen at the beginning. Of course when Spidey hits the headlines J. Jonah rears his ugly yellow-teeth-stained head. Of course, this is the early days of superheroes. You couldn't just find them on every corner like you can now. But there was another foursome making waves in the big city at about the same time..."

"I loved the idea because I was interested in seeing what David had to say about Peter's life before Uncle Ben's death," Simons continued. "We all know the story; we all know that the crushing blow that was the 'Great Responsibility' part of the equation. So I thought it would be a lot of fun to take a look at Peter's life when it was just 'With Great Power...' After the bite, but before Ben's death. And David and Tony have really been doing some tremendous work here."

While the idea of Spider-Man living it up is fun, Lapham reminds us that eventually Uncle Ben *does* die, and "Comes Great Responsibility" gets added on to the phrase, which them becomes Peter's mantra. "I think it's so important because he wants to go down that dark road," Lapham said. "I shouldn't even say 'dark' because I don't mean that in a bad way. Being a rock star isn't evil, but Peter's different. He has these powers. He has a higher calling. He has the values May and Ben instilled to live up to. He can't go down that path. But he wants to. Don't we all? So this one simple phrase gets at the core of it. It constantly centers him in a life that can get very complicated."



Tony Harris, best known in recent years for his work on ***Ex Machina,*** explained why he finds Spider-Man so appealing. "It's simple and uncomplicated—he's one of the few characters in a costume at Marvel that I dig... I approach him in my own way, I think. I mean, I definitely am aware of those guys, and what they brought to the character, but I think you have to try to bring your own deal when you come onto a character with this kind of history in place - especially following that many artists over the years. You want to be singular. I view this as maybe my only shot at the character, so I have to get it right."

Spider-Man: With Great Power #1, a $3.99 will be published under Marvel's Marvel Knights imprint, which frees it from any forced links with current continuity. The first issue is slated for January 9, 2008 release.

by Matt Brady (with Cliff Biggers)

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

Comic Shop Newsarama

Produced by Comic Shop News in cooperation with Matt Brady and newsarama.com

New Insiders on Outsiders

It's not uncommon for *CSN* to bring you news of a new creative team on a comic book series—but it's rare that we report on a change in creative teams prior to the release of the first issue!

Batman and the Outsiders #1, now slated for mid-November release, will be brought to you by the new team of *Chuck Dixon & Julian Lopez*, who have been drafted to replace the initially-slated team of *Tony Bedard & Koi Turnbull*.

Dixon offered a little insight into the reasons for the change. "Anyone in any kind of creative endeavor can tell you that, no matter how hard you work at something, it all somehow gets away from you. It's happened to me enough

times. That seems to be the case here," Dixon told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Matt Brady*.

"No one in this business has greater respect for *Tony [Bedard]* than I do. The guy is dedicated, conscientious and has never written anything less than world-class comics entertainment. But whatever it was that the folks at DC wanted from this book, it just wasn't coming together. I take this on faith as I wasn't shown any of their material.

"That said, I'll be running with what they set up in the one-shots in a whole different direction simply because I have no idea what their direction was to be. The character line-up and the dynamic of the book will be what Tony set up in ***Outsiders #50***. By editorial fiat and the demands of continuity, the line-up will change with issue #3 and #4. Some jaw-dropping additions to the team will occur then. I'm also playing with one of the team members I've inherited in a way that has never been done in an ensemble book like this."

What's the biggest difference between Dixon's take and Bedard's take on the book? "Just from the inferences at the initial meetings, it seems like my take will be more direct action as opposed to Tony's more intrigue-laden plotlines. Tony does that whole intrigue thing so much better than I do. Of course, I'm only going off of the very vaguest notions of what the book was to be like with Tony on board. It's very weird because this was a book I was looking forward to reading!"

For readers who aren't familiar with the new ***Outsiders*** dynamic, Dixon offered a synopsis. "Batman is forever frustrated by the way the JLA and its subsidiaries operate. He originally formed the Outsiders to be a more pro-active, preventative force for battling global baddies. He returns to the group for the same reason. He finds mostly flawed or secondary or unwanted heroes (and anti-heroes and outright villains) and casts them into a kind of Impossible Mission force to bring down evildoers while their plans are still in the making. The original series' premise is even more relevant today with real-life supervillains threatening civilization every day."

What can readers expect from the series? "It's action. It's team dynamics. We have a twist on an established villain that takes up much of the first few issues. We have some amazing guest stars and new team members coming up very quickly. You get to see a writer who majored in agriculture in high school struggle to learn the periodic table so he can write Metamorpho convincingly. The artwork is stunning. Batman's in it. And we have a few DCU continuity shake-ups coming that should have the fanboys buzzing around the cash register on Wednesday."

Part of the appeal of the series, as far as Dixon is concerned, is the opportunity to work with the Dark Knight. "Batman is always fun to write, even though it's a mite intimidating. But with ten years experience, I think I know the guy. And as complex and deep a guy as he is on his own, he's even more fascinating when confronted with leading a group; particularly a group as disparate and rowdy as this one. And it's gonna get a *lot* rowdier. This ensemble is very much aware that they are working for Batman not partnered with him. Some will rail under this and that leads to problems."

Batman & the Outsiders #1 is scheduled for November 14th release.

Inter-Galactica Odyssey

Fans of the ***Battlestar Galactica*** television series enjoy the occasional hints and references to the series' backstory that are interspersed in various episodes—but anyone who wants the *whole* story is going to have to turn off the television and pick up a comic book!

Battlestar Galactica: Origins, a new ongoing series from Dynamite Entertainment, will spotlights the early days of the ***Galactica's*** crew... and those who threaten her.

"We've had writers and creators working on Galactica stories for the last year, originally as a collection of mini-series," *Joe Rybandt*, Dynamite Editorial, said. "As they came together, we had a thought internally about creating a new series – ***Origins*** – and placing them within, all to serve as a companion to our current ongoing, ***Season Zero*** by *Brandon Jerwa & Jackson Herbert*."

Since ***Battlestar Galactica*** is a licensed property, and these stories being told haven't been shown in the television series, where do the stories and their component elements come from? "These stories have been developed over the last couple of years, while the show itself was developing its own backstory, so we combine what we know from the show and work in

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advance with the producers to fill in areas that they're not exploring," Rybandt said.

"We could tell stories for years on each and every cast member as there are so many rich characters, but to start, we're focusing on the heavy hitters: Baltar and Six, Adama and Starbuck. We also have an event from the origins of the Galactica universe we're focusing on, and that's the first Cylon War, that may be folded into the ***Origins*** series, or may be an ***Origins*** mini-series—that's being decided now.

"As for the first arc, Baltar's story is the key to the ***Galactica*** we know today. It was him that set the stage for the Cylon Apocalypse and he's a truly fascinating character. Throw in his relationship with the Cylon model Six and you've got a no-brainer to start."

The first arc is being written by *Kevin Fahey*, a newcomer to comics but not to ***Galactica***. "*Mark [Verheiden]* sent Kevin our way and he's proven to be an invaluable resource as from the time we started talking," Rybandt said. "He's a staff writer on the show, and he now has a direct connection to the future of the show and the stories they are planning."

"Mark put me in touch with *Nick Barrucci*, who was kind enough to listen to a couple pitches for some ***Battlestar*** comics," Fahey said. "I really wanted to write for comics, and after I made the initial contact with Nick and Joe, I spent some serious time brainstorming what ***Battlestar*** stories would be unique as a comic series, what stories I knew the show wouldn't be able to tell and what I was drawn to as both a fan/writer on the show and as a comic reader. Luckily, he and Joe Rybandt liked the idea of an origin story of Baltar…and here I am!"

"Kevin is first up, though we're not done with him after his four issues," Rybandt said. "After Kevin, we have *Robert Napton* working on an Adama series and then *Christopher Golden* on a Starbuck series, though that won't be the only Starbuck series we're telling. The aforementioned Cylon War will be written by *Joshua Ortega & Eric Nylund*, and then we're working on the return of *Kevin Fahey* with the ultimate 'origin' story."

So who's handling the visuals on this project? "***Origins*** is being drawn by *Jonathan Lau*, who did the ***Pegasus*** one-shot for us," Rybandt said. "Jonathan brings the essence of the character to the forefront and is perfect for all of the technical and mechanical details of the show. We may be rotating artists on ***Origins***, so stay tuned for more inclusions."

Battlestar Galactica: Origins #1 is slated for late November release

CSNsider

•In a recent posting on the ComicBloc forums, *Geoff Johns* told readers that ***Green Lantern #25***, the finale to the hit "Sinestro Corps War" story arc, has been delayed two weeks. Johns reported that the conclusion "is 54 story pages. *Fifty Four*! *Ethan Van Sciver* is illustrating eleven of those pages - epilogues leading to our third epic - and *Ivan Reis* is illustrating the remaining 43! You've all seen the beautiful work Ivan has done. He'll be doing nearly two issues in six weeks to get this book out just two weeks later than planned - December 12th.

"I do not want to sacrifice the quality level we've maintained on ***Green Lantern***. No one at DC does. No one else is going to be drawing pages meant for Ivan. And you should all thank Ivan for working every waking second to deliver this monster of a book. He loves ***Green Lantern*** and he knows how important this story is to you. He is sacrificing everything else in his life right now to finish this book. In a day and age where it's taken at face value that amazing artists can't produce that much material, Ivan defies them. The amount of beautiful work he generates cannot be beat!"

•About Comics invites readers to take a nostalgic trip into a bygone era with ***Captain Billy's Whiz Bang Replica Edition***. This facsimile of a 1922 issue of the racy entertainment magazine was the first major hit from Captain Billy Fawcett, whose went on to launch Fawcett Comics and Captain Marvel. (This magazine, a product of its times, includes material that might be considered offensive by today's standards of political correctness, so be warned!)

•Comics veteran *Beau Smith*, whose experience in comics includes lengthy stints at Eclipse, Image, IDW, and Todd McFarlane Productions, shares his accumulated wisdom in ***No Guts, No Glory: How to Market Yourself in Comics***, an informal look at the business side of comics.

•Bad news for readers eager to find out what happens next in the four-part *J. Michael Straczynski-Joe Quesada* ***Spider-Man: One More Day*** four-issue arc. ***Sensational Spider-Man #41*** (***One More Day*** part three), initially slated to appear last week, has now been pushed back to November 28th. ***Amazing Spider-Man #545*** (***One More Day*** part four), initially slated to appear the first Wednesday in December, has now been rescheduled for December 27th release. And that means that the three-part "Brand New Day" arc, which was slated to appear in the thrice-monthly ***Amazing Spider-Man*** immediately after ***One More Day*** wrapped up, is now pushed back until January 2008. Keep checking ***CSNsider*** for further news regarding any additional delays or schedule changes.

•*Rod Espinosa*, best known for fantasy projects such as ***The Courageous Princess*** and ***Neotopia***, blends SF and fantasy in his next major project for Antarctic Press, ***Prince of Heroes***. The book follows a young boy as he ventures across the universe on a quest to fulfill his destiny; look for the first issue in January.

•*Rick Geary, Fred Hembeck, Rob Walton, R.G. Taylor*, and many other well-known creators prove that the story behind the story can be pretty fascinating. ***The Comic Eye***, a 176-page trade paperback shipping from Blind Bat in January, offers 45 short biographical and fictional tales about comics and comics creators, all presented behind an eye-catching *Dave Sim* EC-homage cover.

•The classic ***Classics Illustrated*** are returning, albeit in a slightly more expensive format! January sees the release of several $9.99 softcover editions of hard-to-find ***Classics Illustrated***, including ***A Tale of Two Cities*** (adapted by *Joe Orlando*), ***Gulliver's Travels*** (adapted by *Lillian Chestney*), ***Huckleberry Finn*** (adapted by *Mike Sekowsky & Frank Giacoia*), and ***Frankenstein*** (adapted by *Robert Webb & Ann Brewster*).

•Break out those ***Miami Vice*** suits, 'cuz the 80s are coming back! In early 2008, Dynamite relaunches the ***Turtles***-inspired series ***Adolescent Radioactive Black Belt Hamsters***, courtesy of *Keith Champagne & Tom Nguyen*, who are working with series creator *Don Chin* to update the anthropomorphic action-adventure series.

•***Star Wars*** artist *Joe Corroney* has been tapped by DC to supply the 1: 11 variant cover for DC's ***Salvation Run #1*** (DC had originally announced that *Scott Kolins* would provide that variant cover). The series by *Bill Willingham & Sean Chen* follows some of DC's best-known villains as they're exiled on a distant world. Willingham explained what the series was about: "Just like England decided that, 'Hey, we have this great little place called Australia that we own (they didn't care about the inhabitants) - let's use it as a prison. Let's ship all of our ne'er do wells there.' ***Salvation Run*** takes that idea and applies it to the DC Universe.The skies are full of planets that can support life in the DCU, and they finally decide to pick one, and to just get rid of the super villain problems for good. We're not judging them anymore, we're not going to go through the song and dance and find them guilty, we're just saying that we're tired of them—tired of them committing crimes, and tired of them not being able to stay locked up or reforming. So they wash their hands of them - wish them good luck in the new place, and…boot 'em.

"All of them want to conquer the world and rule the planet. They're just given a planet to rule and conquer. And there's no doorway to come back. The technology is controlled earthside, and there's no way for anyone on the planet to access it."

Watch the sparks fly next week when ***Salvation Run #1*** is slated for release.

•Want to know how Devil's Due's ***Voltron*** series should have ended? You can find out in January's ***Voltron***

Complete Omnibus, a 304-page hardcover that collects every issue of both volumes of the series—and it adds the previously-unpublished twelfth issue!

•*CSN* told you about this one back in July, and now it's officially on the schedule: ***Doctor Who*** begins its run at IDW in January, courtesy of *Gary Russell & Nick Roche*. This is the first-ever original ***Who*** series created for the American market, and you can be sure it has the look and feel of the original (after all, it's written by the TV show story editor!).

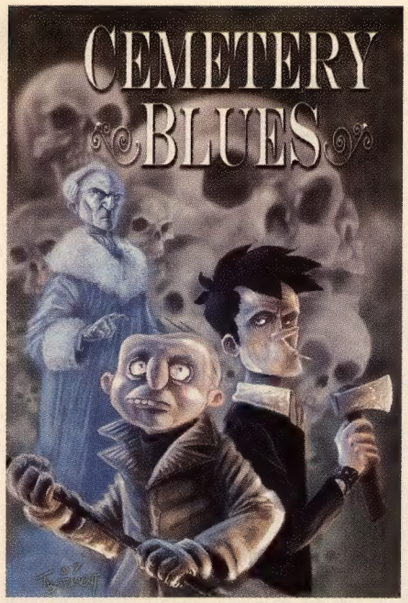
•***Nexus #100***, originally slated for fall release from *Steve Rude's* Rude Dude Productions, has been rescheduled for January 2008. The revised date will ensure that he and writer *Mike Baron* can deliver the book on an approximately-monthly schedule.

•Iron Man is the next hero to get the deluxe DVD treatment from Graphic Imaging Technologies. ***The Invincible Iron Man Complete Collection DVD-ROM*** offers every Iron Man tale from the hero's 1962 debut through December of 2006, including all articles, Bullpen Bulletins, pin-ups, and all original ads.

Coming Comics—Image in January

B. Clay Moore, Seth Peck, Ed Tadem, & Tigh Walker present two tales of bicentennial street justice in the eight-issue ***'76*** miniseries. The first story stars Jackie Karma, a Sixties-era New York City karate master and street fighting legend who comes out of retirement to battle an old foe. The second feature, "Cool," spotlights Los Angeles bounty hunters Pete Walker and Leon Campbell as they deal with runaway strippers, geriatric gangsters, drug-dealing dwarves and ex-porn star hit men.

Ryan Rubio & Thomas Boatwright got them ***Cemetery Blues***, woh yeah... The book follows bumbling monster hunters



Ridley and Falstaff as they pursue their nemesis, the mysterious sorcerer Orlok. The trail leads them to the town of Hernesburg, where the heroes are asked to dispose of a lurking evil in the woods... only because the town's own hunter has turned up dead!

Want to know how to make webcomics? *Scott Kurtz & Kristofer Straub* share their experience and knowledge in ***How to Make Webcomics***, a 290-page guidebook in which they offer advice on how to create compelling characters, develop a solid comic strip, build a website, forge a community, and start earning money from your creation.

Robert Kirkman's ***Invincible*** turns fifty this month... and in celebration of the half-a-hundred mark, Kirkman joins with *Ryan Ottley, Corey Walker, & Bill Crabtree* to present the grand Invincible-Cecil Stedman face-off, as well as an all-new Science Dog backup story and the origin of Cecil Stedman.

Paul Grist relaunches Jack Staff's adventures on a monthly basis beginning with ***Jack Staff Special #1***, which features Jack's faceoff with Molachi the Immortal.

Lucha Libre breaks into the third dimension with the debut of the ***Lucha Libre: El Panda*** and ***Mini-Gobi Original Vinyl Figures***.

Meet Mr. Universe, the intrepid hero who works day and night to make the world a safer place, in *Vassilis Gogtzilas & K.I. Zachopoulos'* ***Mr. Universe*** one-shot. So does he really work 24-7 to fulfill his hero destiny? Well, the answer to that is an interesting story...

Gustavo Higuera & Guiseppe DeLuca tell the story of the "Lonely Ones," real-life truth-seekers who attempt to bring the truth to the masses, in ***New World Order #1***.

Steve Pugh, Dave Elliot, & Michael Town relaunch their short-lived ***Shark-Man*** as an Image series beginning in January.

Sample *Phil Hester & Michael Broussard's* ***The Darkness*** and *Ron Marz & Stjepan Sejic's* ***Witchblade*** in the bargain-priced (and self-explanatory) ***Witchblade/The Darkness First Look***.

Following up on last month's hardcover compilation of the remastered *Rob Liefeld* series, *Joe Casey & Derec Donovan* relaunch ***Youngblood*** as a monthly book. Shaft! Die Hard! Badrock! Cougar! Doc Rocket! Johnny Panic! They all return... but for how long? A new administration demands a new Youngblood team, but there are darker forces at work. Is it just another shot at the fame game... or is there a greater destiny involved?

Image collected editions include:

•***The Astounding Wolf-Man Volume One***, collecting the first four issues of the *Robert Kirkman-Jason Howard* series;

•***Bomb Queen III: Bombshell***, a trade paperback collecting the third *Jimmie Robinson* miniseries;

•***Captain Stoneheart & the Truth Fairy***, a hardcover edition of the *Joe Kelly-Chris Bachalo* comic, featuring Bachalo's pencil artwork and Kelly's full script, along with an audio CD reading of the story;

•***Hunter-Killer Volume One***, collecting ***Hunter Killer #s 0-12*** and the ***Hunter-Killer Dossier***;

•***Noble Causes Archives Volume One***, a massive 598-page black and white compendium that includes ***Noble Causes: First Impressions, Noble Causes #s 1-4, Family Secrets #s 1-4, Distant Relatives #s 1-4***, and the first twelve issues of the ongoing ***Noble Causes*** series;

•***Strange Girl Volume 4: Golden Lights***, collecting the final issues of the *Rick Remender-Peter Bergting* series; and

•***Witchblade Volume One: Witch Hunt***, collecting ***Witchblade #s 80-85***.

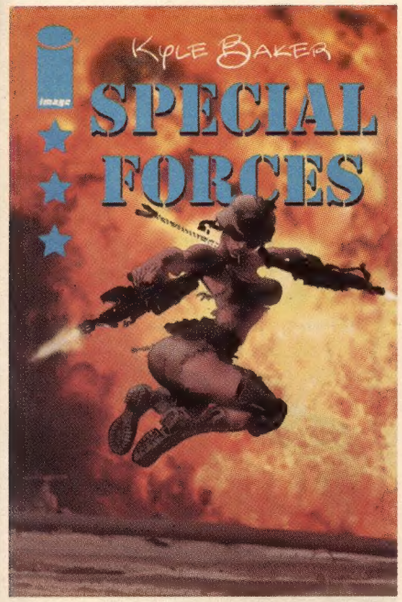
CSNsights
Reviews by Cliff Biggers

Special Forces #1
(Image, $2.99)

Right off the bat, I should say that ***Special Forces*** isn't at all what I expected. Baker has excelled at humor in recent years, so the "autistic young man joins the army" description led me to expect an irreverent satire of war and human nature.

Instead, what I got was *Kyle Baker* channeling *Frank Miller* from the height of his career. And the result was a surprisingly strong, compelling human interest comic set against the grim backdrop of war.

The focus of the story is a dysfunctional band of brothers and sisters waging war in Iraq. Through this group of desperate human beings transformed into desperate soldiers, Baker invokes Stephen Crane's vision of war as often-uncontrolled chaos in which heroism is often an accident and emotion frequent-



ly supercedes intellect.

This isn't a light-hearted book; Baker drives the grim story from event to event at an unrelenting pace, creating a stark view of life in a war-zone. But that edge makes it a compelling read, and I'm curious to see where Baker goes with the next issue.

Grade - A-

Spectrum Presents Frank Frazetta: Rough Work

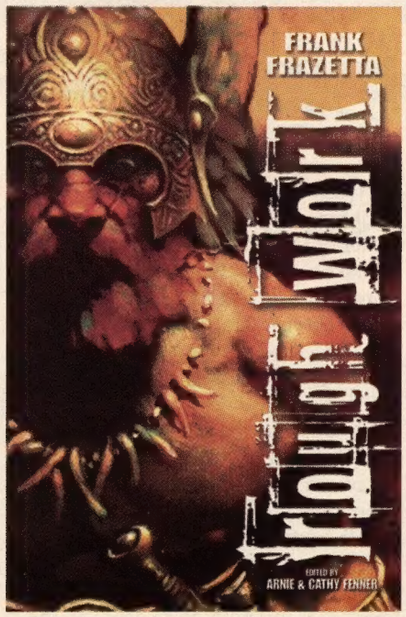
(Underwood, $19.99)

Like almost every fantasy fan, I have an unabashed love for the finished paintings of *Frank Frazetta*. I bought my first *Edgar Rice Burroughs* novel and my first Conan paperback because of the visual allure of Frazetta's intoxicatingly imaginative paintings, and I've always ranked im as one of comics and fantasy's most influential visualists.

No book has ever instilled more of an appreciation of Frazetta's work than this modest volume of sketches, color roughs, and cover designs. What we're seeing here is Frazetta at his most dynamic, focusing on vitality and intensity instead of polish and finesse. My personal favorite is a color pencil rough of an early ERB cover for *Don Wollheim's* Ace F-edition series; it's rare to see Frazetta working solely in colored pencil (although once you see this piece, you'll wish he had done much more of them!).

Thanks to my friend *Richard Garrison*, I was once lucky enough to lay eyes on hundreds of original *Roy G. Krenkel* roughs—shoeboxes full of sketches and doodles and layouts and other unfinished pieces. This book evoked memories of the awe I felt as I flipped through those pieces; it's rare we gain such insight into the work of such a master illustrator.

Grade - A+



Showcase Presents World's Finest Volume One TP

(DC $16.99)

This is the sort of comic book storytelling that made me fall in love with comics to begin with.

What more could a reader ask for? Superman and Batman, comrades and friends, united to confront a variety of criminals, aliens, and the occasional super-villain. And that's part of the charm of these stories--the super-villains and the grand world-saving confrontations are few and far between. Instead, we get numerous stories in which Superman and Batman have to use their keen intellects to overcome challenges... and often, their skills and powers are secondary to the human side of the story.

These are happy heroes, satisfied with themselves and confident in what they do. No angst, no soul-searching, no moral ambiguities... Just adventure and fun.

And of course, there's the wonderful visual imagery from *Dick Sprang, Curt*

PREVIEWS

One Catalog. TONS of Cool Stuff.

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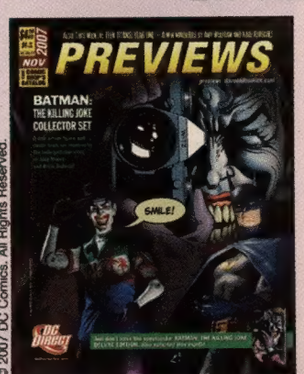
ON THE COVER ...



BATMAN: THE KILLING JOKE COLLECTOR SET— Based on the art of Brian Bolland, this new set of action figures was inspired by the stunning story that redefined evil! This window boxed set includes newly sculpted versions of Batman and The Joker, plus the graphic novel that inspired them!

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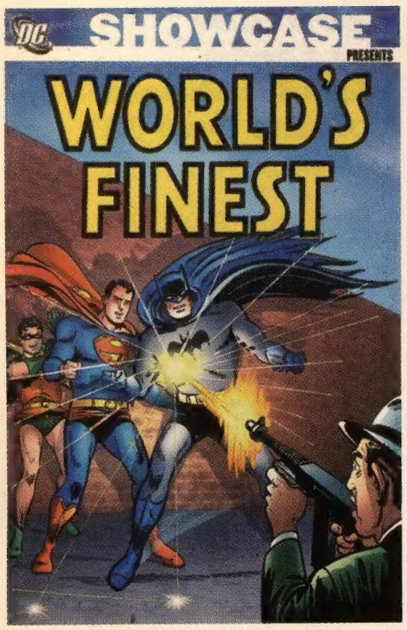

Swan, and others. Forget the distorted-musculature, steroid-abusive iconography all too common in superhero comics today; these are strong, solid, athletic heroes who still look like human beings, illustrated skillfully by some of the field's most talented artists.

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Grade - A

Mighty Avengers #s 1-5

(Marvel $2.99@)

Brian Bendis. Frank Cho. The Avengers. Ultron.

It sounds like a recipe for comics success, doesn't it?

But somehow, it just doesn't gel. Bendis's storyline, which experiments with narrative structure through the use of thought balloons that often juxtapose with the dialogue, often seems loose and abrasive. Cho struggles artistically to work in the "good girl" art that he so obviously loves to draw; everything else seems forced and flat.

This storyline is proof positive that what sounds good in theory doesn't always work in practice. I admire the willingness to experiment—I only wish I could enjoy the results.

Grade - C-

Justice League of America #13

(DC $2.99)

I wasn't sure if DC had found the right man to succeed *Brad Meltzer* as writer of DC's flagship superteam book. By the time I had finished ***Justice League of America #13***, I knew that new writer *Dwayne McDuffie* wasn't going to match Meltzer's run on this title—he's shooting to surpass it, and he's succeeding quite well so far!

Meltzer launched the book with a very strong storyline building up tot the establishment of the team's roster, and he followed that up with an intense JLA-JSA crossover story arc... but after that, he was pretty much done. The last couple of issues were "treading water" books that did nothing to progress the overall storyline.

Right from the beginning, though, McDuffie is doing Meltzer one better. Remember how Meltzer reinterpreted DC's villains in ***Identity Crisis***, making them seem truly dangerous for the first time in far too long? Well, McDuffie continues that villainous revamp as some of DC's most dangerous nasties combine to form their own Injustice League, making this whole superhero gig seem *very* dangerous...

Grade - A

All Star Batman & Robin, The Boy Wonder #7

(DC $2.99)

I would never have believe, two years ago, that a Batman comic featuring words by *Frank Miller* and pictures by *Jim Lee* could ultimately be one of the biggest train wrecks in comics history.

But I never imagined that *Frank Miller* would willfully disregard every aspect of Batman's character as established over the past sixty years in order to tell a ***Sin City*** story in bat-garb.

This book gets more off-track and intentionally offensive with each issue (although I don't know if Miller can do worse than he does with this issue's farcical, Tarantinoesque sequence involving Batman and the Black Canary). This isn't Batman... it's a costumed thug who fights crime by setting the criminals afire and then beating them. It's an absurdist version of Frank Castle in a Bat-suit.

I *do* have an idea how to improve it, though: reprint the book with blank word balloons, and let readers submit their own scripts. I'm convinced that *Jim Lee's* art is strong enough that someone can get a good story out of this—but it ain't here.

Grade - D (it would be an F if not for the appeal of Jim Lee's art)

Gene Simmons' Dominatrix #s 1 & 2

(IDW $3.99)

I'll confess—this series is not at all what I expected. Perhaps that's one reason why I was impressed with the first two issues—I went into this with low expectations, and *Sean Taylor* managed to surpass them quite capably.

Let's face it—when you hear that Kiss's *Gene Simmons* is listed as the concept's creator, it's only natural to expect outrageous sexploitation. What's surprising is that the sexual overtones of the protagonist's dominatrix lifestyle play only a background role in this espionage-suspense-adventure saga. Her costume may keep that dominatrix role in the spotlight, but ultimately it underscores how fetishistic the average comic book costume really is—her "work clothes" actually look less provocative than a lot of what passes for superheroine's costuming nowadays!

This isn't groundbreaking story-telling—in fact, it seems a little out of place at IDW, a company that tends to go for a more sophisticated edge to most of its books (***Transformers*** notwithstanding)—but it's capably done, and it had an appeal similar to that the ***Alias*** television series.

Grade - B-

Death of the New Gods #1

(DC $3.50)

Here's *Jim Starlin* doing what the sort of cosmic melodrama that he does best. This time, he's coming in to wipe out some of Kirby's most famous DC creations—and he gets started quite early, eliminating one of the most popular of these characters in a very brutal manner in the first issue.

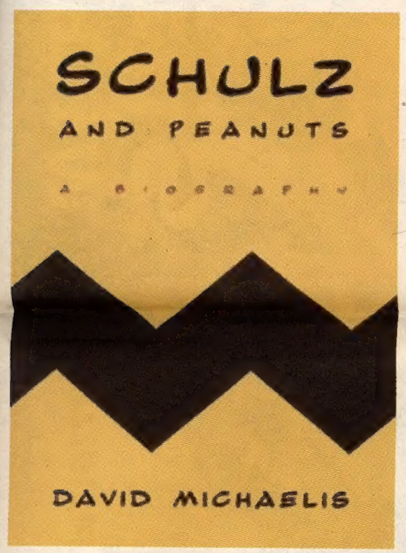
It's a strong story weakened slightly by the fact that DC gave away its climactic final scene in the pages of the same week's ***Countdown***; I'm sure that I'm not the only reader who starts his DC reading with the latest issue of that weekly series, so it was disappointing to find a spoiler casually tossed into that issue.

Nevertheless, Starlin's story is powerful, and he's one of the few writers who manages to convey the epic scope of Kirby's Apokolips and New Genesis.

Artistically, Starlin's work isn't always as effective as his storytelling; while his finishing is quite polished, the underlying anatomy seems at times distorted and ungainly.

Starlin has indicated that this series will deliver just what the name implies—and judging from the first issue, he's a man of his word. I wouldn't mind seeing a few more surprises—but it's early yet...

Grade - B



Schulz & Peanuts: A Biography

(Harper $34.95)

It's rare that a comic creator becomes so successful that his name is almost as well known as that of his characters, but *Charles Schulz* is just such an exceptional figure.

In this hefty volume, *David Michaelis* attempts to explore the life of the ***Peanuts*** creator—and in doing so, he strives to show that there is far more of *Charles Schulz* in Charlie Brown than the writer/artist ever wanted us to know. As Michaelis tells it, Shulz's success and popularity was never sufficient to offset his deeply rooted feelings of inadequacy, and how his own unhappy life experiences were the root of his character's appeal.

Any of us who found occasional facets of our own insecurities and sorrows reflected in Charlie Brown's comic strip experiences never doubted that Schulz drew from real life. However, Michaelis presents an unrelentingly unpleasant and somber view of Schulz, transforming this successful writer-artist into an anguished soul virtually bereft of any happiness.

While Schulz's family has objected to this stark view of the artist's life, there's no doubt that Michaelis makes his case quite effectively, using references and selected strips to delineate the interrelationship of creator and creation.

It may not be the perfect Schulz biography, but it's the best one out there thus far. My only regret is that, if the family is correct in criticizing the book's one-sided view, the success of ***Schulz & Peanuts*** might prevent a more balanced biography from seeing print for quite a while.

Grade - B

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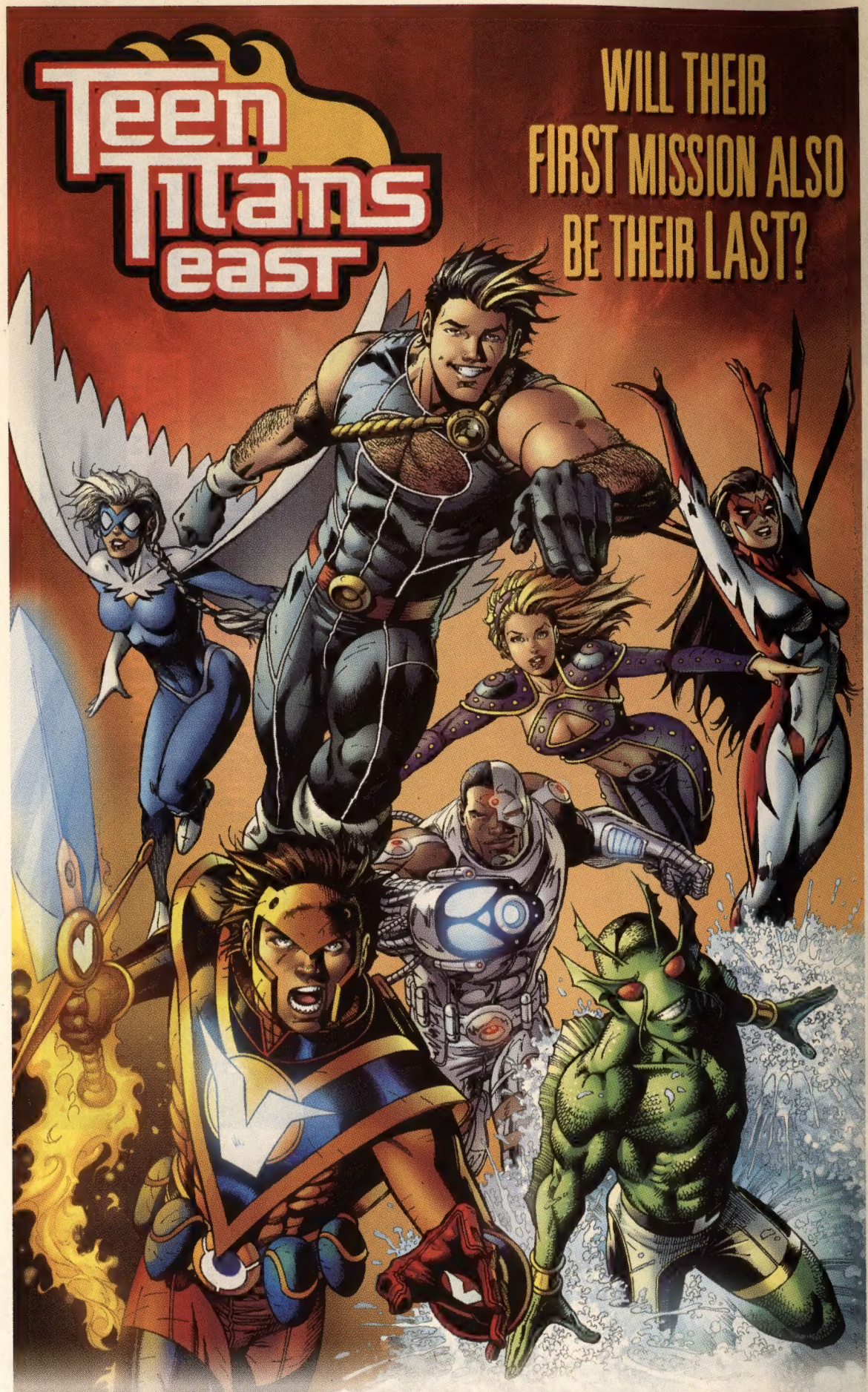

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